

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5497

As of February 9, 2009

Title: An act relating to the delivery of home health care services through telemedicine.

Brief Description: Concerning telemedicine.

Sponsors: Senators Marr, Keiser and Murray.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/02/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7465)

Background: Technology that transmits medical information between patients and health care practitioners has evolved over the last decade. One area of technology that provides for immediate communication between a patient in that patient's home, and a health care provider in a clinic or office, focuses on routine monitoring of vital signs and disease progression. This kind of "telemedicine" is increasingly being used in the home health care industry where many of the clients being served are homebound elderly with chronic illness. Telemedicine technologies are capable of transmitting blood pressure information from hypertensive patients, blood sugar levels from diabetics, or weight checks from patients with cardio pulmonary disease. Devices that stay in the patients' homes remind them to take their medications, and require them to answer questions about how well they slept and their pain levels. This information mimics what health care providers seek when they make a home visit. Home health agencies that monitor patients through "televisits" report better health outcomes for many of their clients.

Summary of Bill: Home health care services delivered through telemedicine are covered by and reimbursed under the state's medicaid payment program. The Department of Social and Health Services is directed to establish reimbursement rates for telemedicine home health services that are comparable to rates paid for in-person home health visits. Telemedicine is defined as medical services or treatment, transfer of medical data, or education related to health services using audio, video, or data communication. Home health services providers using telemedicine must offer patients the option to refuse telemedical treatment, and must describe all confidentiality protections and their opportunity for access to their telemedical records.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE COMMITTEE (Proposed First Substitute): It is clarified that the telemedicine services are those provided by home health agencies licensed under 70.127 RCW. Telemedicine is telemonitoring used to enhance the delivery of certain home health medical services, through the electronic transfer of medical data, or the provision of certain education related to health care services using audio, video or data communication in-lieu of a face-to-face visit.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Telemedicine allows home health nurses to monitor patients much more closely and make medical decisions before there is an emergency. Monitoring vital signs for people with chronic disease is essential and doing it electronically allows for much more attention to disease progression. Patients who live at home feel much safer. Reimbursement should be provide for the work done with telemonitoring.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Leslie Emerick, Home Care Association of Washington; Randy Dalton, Community Home Health and Hospice; Bonnie Dean, home health patient; Patty Mulhern, RN.